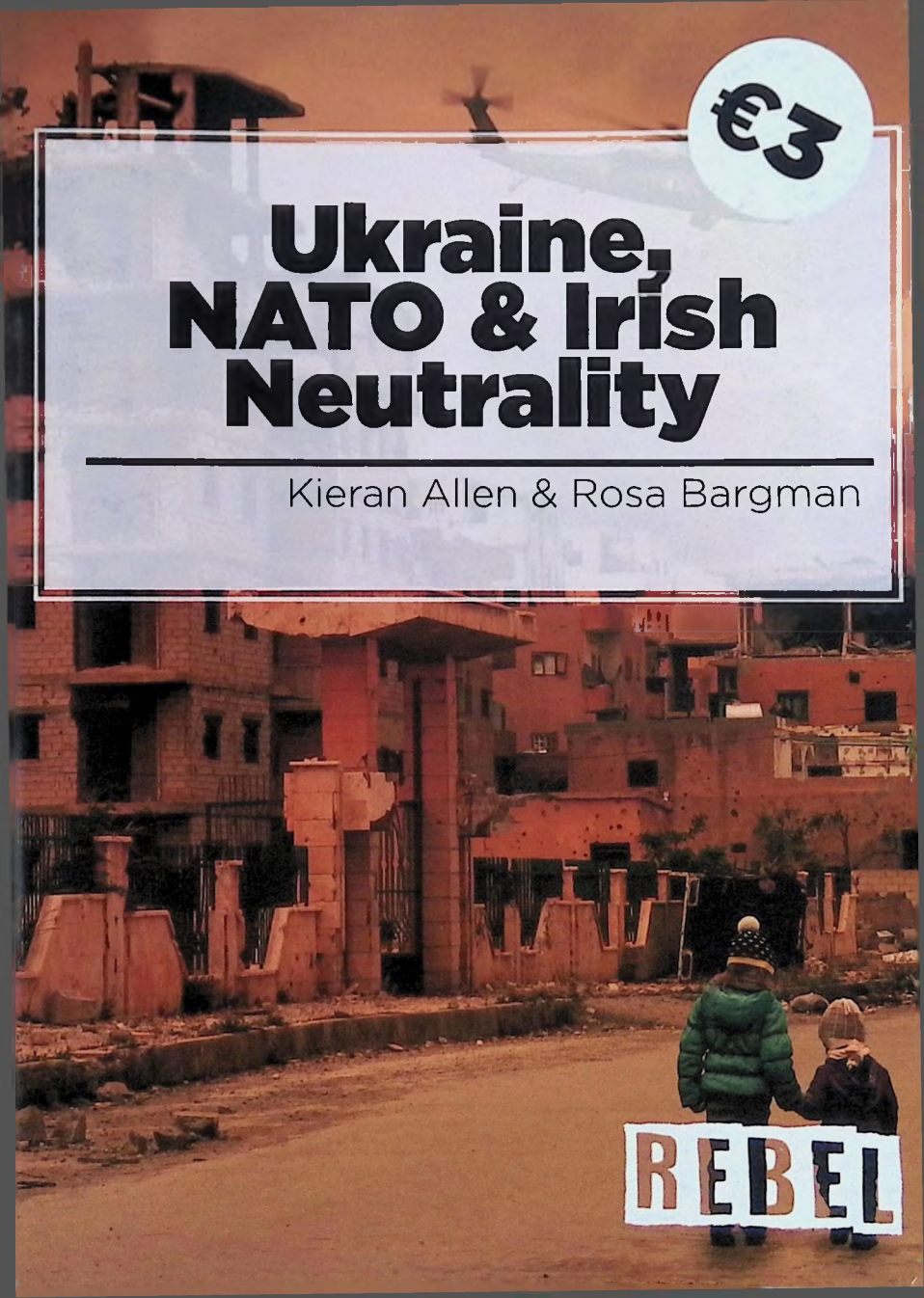




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Ukraine, NATO & Irish Neutrality

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CHAPTER 1: IMPERIALISM AND WAR

When we hear the word 'empire', many picture scenes set in bygone eras. Colonial armies conquering and dividing Africa, the transatlantic slave trade perhaps, and evidently exploitative invasions of foreign lands. It is often associated with monarchy or dictatorship and much less with states that define themselves as upholding the principles of freedom and democracy.

One might conclude that the age of imperialism, and that of empires, must have ended with the collapse of the Berlin wall at the latest, when the Soviet Union lost control of its satellite states, or even as soon as France and Britain were forced to grant independence (at least on paper) to their colonies. One might assume that this meant an end to global conflict and war. But capitalism, especially in its globalised form cannot survive without war. In a world that is run by financial capital and the monopolies the capitalist world order produces, there can never be an end to war and empires.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in his 1917 book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* explained that the balance of powers, resulting from global commodity production for profit, necessitates global armed conflict. As he put it:

The capitalists divide the world, not out of any particular malice, but because the degree of concentration which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to obtain profits. And they divide it 'in proportion to capital', 'in proportion to strength', because there cannot be any other method of division under commodity production and capitalism. (pp. 68-69).

Despite what it claims, capitalism is not a pure market economy because corporations must forge a close relationship with states and their military power. As they grow bigger, their relationship with their state becomes more intense and the most powerful states seek to expand the openings and opportunities for their corporations. The right-wing US writer, Thomas Friedman spelled this out clearly in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*.

Markets function and flourish only when property rights are secured and can be enforced, which in turn requires a political framework protected and backed by military power...indeed, McDonalds cannot function without McDonald Douglas, the designer of the US Airforce F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. (p.464)

While this integration of economic and political power becomes the norm for capitalism, it does so in an uneven and turbulent world. In 'normal' times, the US state will bring hundreds of corporate lobbyists to meetings of the World Trade Organisation to open

market access for US corporations or gain legal protection for their intellectual property. But even as it does so, it finds that its economy has shrunk, compared to that of China. Today, for example, US share of global GDP has declined from 50 percent in 1950 to 14 percent in 2018, whereas China's has surpassed it at 18 per cent. It now faces a similar dilemma to that of Britain before World War 1 when it faced the rising economic power of Germany.

If capitalism were a stable system where dominant corporations maintained that position for ever, there is a chance that there could be an exploitative but peaceful order. But of course, it is not. The dynamic of competition and profit accumulation makes it inherently unstable and uneven. Big corporations are overtaken by rivals; market shares are lost; new technologies give some more advantage over others. When this occurs, corporations turn to their own states for protection and these in turn will deploy military prowess to gain extra leverage. In 2017 the National Security Strategy of the United States sounded an alarm, announcing that the United States was re-entering an era of "great power competition." The US Congress passed a Chips Act to create a 'chokehold' to prevent Chinese companies racing ahead in artificial intelligence and digital technologies. The act effectively outlaws the supply of advanced micro-chips to China. At the same time, the US military stepped up its presence in the South China Sea and became more vociferous in its claim to be a protector of Taiwan. Even before the war in Ukraine begun, the dark clouds of inter-imperialist conflict were becoming more evident.

It is important to understand the historical and political context in which Lenin wrote his early examination of imperialism. The book was finished in the first half of 1916, while he was exiled in Switzerland, commenting on the events of the First World War. The international labour movement had been plunged into a deep crisis from which only class warfare instead of imperialist warfare seemed to promise any chance of escape. Many of the supposed socialists of the Second International had embraced the policy of social chauvinism, or *Burgfriedenspolitik* ("peace in the castle politics") in Germany. They had characterized imperialism as merely the result of blunt foreign policy decisions made by governments or to the influence of nationalist ideologies.

We can see the influence of this concept on our current administrations, and we must similarly condemn it. The policy of social chauvinism has seeped into national policy much in the same way it did in the First World War. In 1914, the Social Democratic Party in Germany abandoned their stance of anti-militarism, voting in favour of the war credits and agreeing to cease any criticism of their government. Today, the Green Party in Germany has led the effort to remilitarize Germany in a campaign to rally support for NATO warmongering.

Their pledge to spend two percent of Germany's GDP (along with a €100 billion special fund) goes explicitly against everything the party was founded on. The Greens had emerged from the student protests of 1968, on a platform of strong environmentalist policies, opposition to war, and promises to switch to green energy solutions.

Going to war is decidedly not green. This is evidenced by the fact that the Department of Defence in the United States is not only the largest consumer of energy but is also the world's largest institutional consumer of petroleum and, thus, the world's largest

institutional emitter of greenhouse gases. As part of seeking independence from Russian gas, and in the context of war, Robert Habeck, the German Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action as well as long-time member of the Greens has promised to embrace coal. Currently an open-cast lignite coal mine is being expanded at a village near Dusseldorf, Lutzerath, which has rightly enraged climate activists. Coal is responsible for over 0.30C of the 10C increase in global average temperatures, making it the single largest source of the rise in global temperature. Oil releases an immense amount of carbon when burned, approximately a third of the world's total carbon emissions.

In our present situation, the international working class finds itself once more divided between two imperialist camps, NATO and the West on one side and Russia along with its allies on the other. The implication is that we must choose to side with either one, and seek the victory of that chosen imperialist power over the other. This pressure is often covered by a claim that one side is better. Thus, in the West, we are told that NATO represents 'democracy' and that the other side is 'authoritarian'. Yet the same democratic West sell arms and bombs to Saudi Arabia, claiming that it is a staunch ally.

Lenin in his time recognized this hypocritical taking of sides:

The epoch of the latest stage of capitalism shows us that certain relations between capitalist associations grow up, based on the economic division of the world; while parallel to and in connection with it, certain relations grow up between political alliances, between states, based on the territorial division of the world, of the struggle for colonies, of the 'struggle for spheres of influence'. (p. 69)

Many well-meaning Western spectators of the war have sided with their own countries, with NATO. But we mustn't forget that there is another way. We can oppose both Russian imperialism and Western imperialism – what is sometimes known as the neither-Washington-nor-Moscow stance.

In the depths of the WW1, a small number of revolutionary socialists recognized, that there can be no end to war within capitalism. They were known as the Zimmerwald Left, after the town where they got together in neutral Switzerland. They called for an immediate end to imperialist war in favour of class war and for the international working class to lay down their weapons to face their real adversary. As the German revolutionary socialist Karl Liebknecht wrote in a 1912 pamphlet:

For capitalism, war and peace are business and nothing but business. [...] Only the international proletariat can avert this horrific danger, for only the interests of the proletariat are the same in all capitalist countries. The international solidarity of the proletariat without accepting frontiers, the common fight against common enemies – national and international – of the proletariat: those who profit by political pressure, those who live off

It is a tradition that this pamphlet draws on today.

NATO: THE IRON FIST OF WESTERN IMPERIALISM

Though the Russian invasion of Ukraine was shocking, it is far from unprecedented. This war has its roots in a global conflict that stretches far beyond the scope of Ukrainian self-determination, or even that of other states in eastern Europe in danger of falling into a similarly compromised position. Its origins are found at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and after the Cold War. As the Financial Times comments, 'Today, eastern Europe is more militarised than at any time since the height of the Cold War. Once again, nuclear superpowers face off across the wide expanse between the Baltic and Black Seas.'

This militarisation is not limited to eastern Europe. Germany's €100 billion increase in military spending represents the largest jump in this sector since World War II. NATO troop presence in eastern Europe has increased tenfold over the course of the Ukraine war. The militarism that is espoused by publications such as the New York Times is evident in their language, asking 'Can Germany be a great military power again?'. The obvious implication that indeed it should. Both Finland and Sweden have abandoned their non-alignment stance and have pledged to join the military alliance.

The consequences have an impact that goes beyond Europe. The US President Biden has broken the United States traditional stance of strategic ambiguity on the issue of the independence of Taiwan. Whereas the United States had previously adopted the policy of maintaining the official line that Taiwan's claim to independence was to be acknowledged though not explicitly endorsed, President Biden recently urged Taiwan to follow Ukraine's example and promised protection in the case of open Chinese aggression.

In order to accurately assess the geopolitical impact stemming from the Ukraine conflict, it is important for socialists to understand the significance of the military alliance at the heart of the war. NATO remains a sacred cow for some, partially because it has become impossible to utter any criticism of the organization without being accused of advancing Russia's political agenda. People Before Profit's TDs have been subject to harsh criticism in response to their refusal to clap for President Zelensky in the Dáil. Their concerns about Zelensky's domestic policies, which have included the banning of popular opposition parties even though they had almost 20 percent of the vote, was dismissed as displaying a lack of solidarity with the plight of Ukraine. Their decision to stand against sanctions on Russia which would hurt ordinary working people were similarly brushed aside as an element of the 'warped ideology'.

Mainstream commentators often assume that support for the Ukrainian people and a dedication to ending the suffering inflicted on them by the Russian invasion is inextricably tied to supporting a NATO intervention. Western critics of NATO can typically be divided into two different groups among those who consider themselves to be on the Left. Firstly there are those who view the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine as some means of self-defence against NATO expansionism in eastern Europe. This 'campist' position holds a position that is strongly in favour of Russia in this conflict. It assumes that one has to choose between rival imperialisms and finds the Russian variety the 'lesser evil'.

Secondly there are those on the Left that are opposed to the imperialism inherent in NATO as well as the Russian invasion. It is important to distinguish between these positions, especially since they are often mischaracterised as belonging to the same frame of thinking. The former merely exchanges one imperialist entity for another and does not accurately assess the conflict as one of inter-imperialist rivalry. It is no more radical than support for the imperialist forces of the West. As socialists, it is therefore essential that we have an understanding as well as principled opposition to both these camps.

This means recognizing that NATO is by no means a defensive alliance or in any way democratic. NATO supported the Greek generals that overthrew their government a month before elections were to take place in 1967. The Greek junta, a right-wing military dictatorship that has been described by contemporary historians as neo-fascist in character, lasted until 1974. Its reign was characterized by severe restrictions to civil liberties as well as the imprisonment, torture and exile of political opponents.

António de Oliveira Salazar, who came to power in the Ditadura Nacional ('National Dictatorship') presided over Portugal when it became one of NATO's first twelve member states. This regime utilized NATO armaments and supplies in the brutal assault on its colonies in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, Angola and Mozambique. In exchange, the Portuguese dictator Marcelo Caetano gave up some of his economic interests to NATO member states. Portugal had at this point been a corporatist dictatorship since 1933 and the regime would continue to uphold its rule until 1974. The Estado Novo ('New State') as it was later reframed by Salazar became one of the most enduring right-wing authoritarian states in Europe in the twentieth century, aiding Francisco Franco's nationalist front in the Spanish Civil War and officially declaring two days of mourning upon Adolf Hitler's death.

Just as NATO supported Portugal to further imperialist ambitions in Africa, so too NATO's destruction of Libya was driven by similar imperatives. After the United Nations authorized a no-fly zone in 2011, NATO, led by the US, launched a brutal bombing campaign against Libya in an effort to achieve regime change and to depose Muammar Gaddafi. Since the beginning of the military offensive there had been allegations that the campaign was violating Resolution 1973 of the United Nations which specifically forbade 'a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory'. Despite this supposed limitation on any intervention on Libyan soil, NATO troops were captured on film breaking the resolution. The campaign only ended with Gaddafi's killing, after taking the lives of tens of thousands of civilians and causing tens of billions of damage to property and infrastructure.

Though Libya had been Africa's most prosperous country, with the highest Human Development Index to be found on the continent, Libya was thrown into a severe humanitarian crisis that has persisted to this day. The political instability that followed the regime change by NATO forces erupted in renewed civil war in 2014 and has resulted in thousands of additional casualties. The violence that began in 2011 with the proliferation of armed groups that formed in response to the unstable government that followed Gaddafi demise ended in 2020 with a ceasefire, but there is no end in sight in terms of Libya's diminished economic status or its humanitarian crisis.

Turkey has been a member of NATO since 1952, despite the open political intervention of that country's army in crushing the left. Even when the army staged coups in 1960 and 1971, there was never any question of expulsion from NATO. Today Hungary is run by the authoritarian Victor Orban. During a June 2015 meeting of Central and Eastern European officials, the European Commission's president, Jean Claude Juncker, even greeted Orban with "Hello, dictator." But none of this has led to Hungary's expulsion from NATO. The NATO project has always been linked to Western colonial ambitions, further emphasised by the fact that France waged brutal wars against Indochina and Algeria while it was a NATO member, supported by American troops.

Recognizing NATO for what it is and has been since the day of its foundation – an imperialist military alliance that is by no means democratic – makes any support for such an organisation impossible. That is why the Socialist Workers Network and People Before Profit stands both against Russia as well as against NATO and the US in this conflict. We must not be intimidated by hostile attempts to paint us as Russian sympathisers and recognise that there is another way.

CHAPTER 3: THE NEW COLD WAR BETWEEN CHINA AND THE USA

When NATO leaders met in Madrid in June 2022, they struck an ominous note. Their Strategic Concept document claimed that there were 'systemic challenges posed by the People's Republic of China to Euro-Atlantic security.' It was a significant departure that signaled a new Cold War.

Many thought that the new hostility between China and America resulted from Trump's xenophobia. Trump imposed punitive tariffs on China in January 2018 and mounted a campaign to ban Huawei from gaining telecommunication contracts in Western countries. Many thought that relations would improve when Biden came to power.

But this is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of imperialism. The military competition between China and America does not arise from differences over policy or the opinions of leaders. The more liberal US President Barack Obama, for example, began the containment strategy over China in 2010 when he announced a pivot of 60% of US military power to Asia. And when Biden came to power, he continued Trump's tariff policy and stepped up the rhetoric against China. There are clearly deeper structural causes for the conflict.

Another preferred explanation for the new cold war is that there is a struggle over values. According to Biden, we are at a stage in history where 'authoritarian regimes' are vying for influence and want to replace the 'democratic regimes'. In a speech at the Lockheed Martin plant in Troy, Alabama he said that America was the 'arsenal of democracy' in an 'ongoing battle in the world between autocracy and democracy'. The suggestion is that differences in the nature of the political regimes is leading to military confrontation.

But again, this makes little sense. The US has no problems with authoritarian regimes that respect its hegemony. Biden, for example, has resumed arms sales to the Saudi dictatorship. Yet this regime is so vile that it could send a young woman to jail for 34 years for re-tweeting criticisms of its rules. The word 'authoritarianism' does not even capture the horrors. The US has long sponsored dictators in Latin America when they were willing to suppress left wing forces. Moreover, the claim that the US views authoritarian regime as an enemy, does not explain US China relations. In the 1990s and early 2000s, US-China relations were so close that commentators used the term 'Chinamerica'. This was a reference to the fact China's economic surplus was lodged in the US banking system and then re-cycled to allow US consumers to borrow heavily to purchase Chinese goods. The US supported China's entry to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and the US President, George Bush, resisted efforts to impose human rights conditions. All of which raises the obvious question, if the nature of the regimes has not changed, why the conflict now?

Another possible explanation of the new Cold War refers to the 'Thucydides trap'. This is a term used by the political scientist, Graham Allison, to describe a tendency to war when an emerging power threatens to displace an existing hegemon. It arises from a quotation by the classical historian, Thucydides, who had claimed that the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta had been inevitable because of Spartan fears of the growth of Athenian power.

While there is some merit in this explanation, it comes across as an abstract rule and relies on a concept of human nature as inevitably and unchangingly competitive. There are huge differences between the social structure of ancient Greek society and that of modern America or China. It is true that all must rely on an economic base for their tax revenues and the production of its weaponry. But in ancient Greece this arose from a fundamentally different economy which relied on slaves, whereas in the modern world the state relies on a capitalist profit-driven economy based on the exploitation of waged labour.

This is where Lenin and Bukharin's theory of imperialism makes sense. Lenin argued that with the stagnation in the Western economies at the end of the 19th century, capital sought super profits in the colonies. This in turn led to a drive by the big powers to scramble for Africa and to divide the world up between them. His point was that capitalism contains within it a drive to war as imperialist countries race to dominate.

Bukharin took a slightly different approach. Whereas Lenin saw finance capital as the driving force co-ordinating the push to colonisation, Bukharin focussed on how capital and state tended to grow together. As corporations expanded and controlled greater parts of an economy, they developed a closer relationship with the state apparatus. Instead of Adam Smith's concept of the nightwatchman state on the periphery of the economy, there is a fusion of the political and economic elites. This in turn means that capitalism shifts from competition between firms over prices in the marketplace to economic, political and, eventually, military competition by states on a global stage.

Bukharin's key insight was to emphasise the unevenness and restless search for supremacy in world markets. At one moment in the 1980s, it looked as though Japan might emerge as a major economic rival to the US. The very nature of capitalism meant that the economic supremacy of the US was not guaranteed because of the system's underlying competitive dynamic. So, the big corporations work with their governments to exert different forms of pressure to gain leverage. They will use a state's influence in global institutions to prise open markets; they will seek tariffs to protect themselves from 'unfair' competition; they will invent stories about threats to national security. And in the final analysis they will call on the military power of states to threaten and intimidate. In the case of Japan, for example, the US was able to exert huge pressure to force it to revalue their currency and make their exports less competitive. In brief, modern-day imperialism grows out of the restless competition between corporations and their states.

The relationship between China and America is almost a text-book example of this theory. Back in the 1970s, US corporations were losing out in the face of competition from Germany and Japan. The huge military spending of the US had helped to stimulate a long post war boom. But this in turn benefited its economic rivals because American

productivity was falling behind that of Germany and Japan precisely because it was diverting more of its investments into a permanent arms economy. The solution for the US ruling class was to create a global neoliberal order. Key to this was the outsourcing of US production to low waged economies like China. To take a paradigmatic case, Apple mobile phones were designed and marketed in America and then manufactured by Foxconn in China. (Sales were often 'booked' in Ireland to take advantage of a spectacular tax dodge).

Historically, the economic power of the US state has been deployed in two crucial ways. First, through its influence in global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or the World Trade Organisation, the US pressed for the opening of economies which had been closed to it previously. The debt crisis of the 1980s provided an opportunity for the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes which typically required a liberalisation on investment, repatriation of profits, privatisation and user fees for public services in return for IMF loans. Second, the dollar has been the lynch pin of Western capitalism since WW2, and this has given the US peculiar advantages. Contrary to expectations that it would cease to be the world reserve currency, it has maintained its overwhelming domination. This allowed the US to run up huge deficits and, even though its productive base was shrinking, it became 'a consumer of last resort'. The US was able to import consumer goods from around the world and maintain a strong domestic market. In addition, the dollar's role as a reserve currency meant that the US enjoyed the right of 'seigniorage'. In other words, it was able to skim off some of the value expressed in the trade in dollars.

All of this helps to explain why the US and China defined themselves as 'strategic partners' in the 1990s. Up to this point, the GDP of China represented just one eighth of America's and appeared as a co-operative partner that accepted US hegemony. However, in recent decades this has changed, and the global economic crisis of 2008 was a pivotal moment. The Chinese government responded to the crash by reflating their home market through state spending. They also squeezed US firms to make room for Chinese corporations to expand. The economic slowdown also meant that Chinese capital suffered from a crisis of over-accumulation. Many of its corporations had a huge industrial over-capacity but not enough consumers to buy its goods. Chinese capitalism therefore began to look for more markets abroad and used the power of its state to create new opportunities. It was a classic example of Lenin and Bukharin's predictions.

In 2013, President Xi, the Chinese leader, announced the Belt and Road Initiative. This led to a surge of Chinese investment in South-East Asia and Africa with the aim of developing ports and transits links for the sale of its goods. Chinese capital also sought to capture as many natural resources as it could to serve its expanding industries. In 2014, it launched the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as a multilateral financial institution offering loans to Asia's developing countries. All of this meant that its corporations were expanding their reach and this quickly brought them up against the stronger imperialist power of the US.

As long as China remained a weak competitor, the US was willing to see it as a 'strategic partner'. But as the Chinese economy expanded at a dramatic rate this led to a change in perception in the US ruling class. According to estimates from the World Bank, the Chinese GDP was approximately 11 percent of the US in 1960, but in 2019 it is 67 percent. In

response to this dramatic growth, the US shifted to a policy of containment. It set up the Trans-Pacific Partnership with other Asian countries and excluded China. In 2015, it produced the Revising US Grand Strategy Towards China report. This called for a new aggressive approach which was soon evident in higher tariffs, investigation of Chinese 'theft' of intellectual property, pressure on allies to restrict the entry of Chinese goods and a stepping up of military operations in the South China Sea.

This is one of the busiest lanes for the import and export of goods from East Asia. The US has sent aircraft carrier battle groups and nuclear capable bombers while China has responded by increasing the scale of what it calls 'defensive' weapons. All of this explains the new battle line that has emerged between the two powers – the issue of Taiwan. The US now talks of military defence of the island and the semi-official publication, Foreign Policy, even speculates on how 'Taiwan could win a war with China'.

We have entered a new more dangerous world of inter-imperialist competition. China is the weaker power because the US has overwhelming military dominance. But despite its military weakness compared to the US, it is a thoroughly capitalist power with imperialist ambitions. Here, for example, is President Xi speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2017:

We must remain committed to developing global free trade and investment, promote trade and liberalization. We will expand market access for foreign investors, build high standard free trade zones, strengthen protection of property rights and level the playing field. China will keep its door wide open and not close it.

Ireland is part of the Western alliance and so the 'soft power' of the US reaches us through the mainstream media. This presents its foreign policy as concerned with defending freedom and democracy. But the whole history of US invasions, sponsorship of coups and support for military dictatorship tells a very different story. Behind its new cold war rhetoric lies an attempt by the US to retain economic supremacy and hegemony. Far from capitalism being a peaceful economic system driven by fair rules of competition, it will always contain a drive to war.

CHAPTER 4: UKRAINE: NATIONAL DEFENCE AND A PROXY WAR

No one can doubt Putin's crimes. He has invaded Ukraine under the pretext that Russia is its 'big brother' and claims there is no real Ukrainian nation. In a long speech justifying his 'special military operation' he has attacked the Bolsheviks for causing the problem by granting self-determination. In the past, he has targeted cities in Syria to aid the dictator Assad and is now deploying the same tactics in Ukraine.

Against such a brutal invasion, Ukrainian people have every right to resist. And while Putin claims he is championing the rights of Russian speakers, the harsh reality is that he is bombing these very people. His brutal war is creating a greater sense of a unified Ukrainian nation than ever before.

Putin's war tactics are a symptom of the brutality that accompanies the latest phase of imperialism. The unevenness of the global economy encourages the big powers to seek advantages against each other through military might. China and the US are already shaping up to each other by combining economic competition with greater military resources.

This type of imperialism arises directly from the nature of capitalism. Ruling elites who are terrified by economic losses seek to compensate with military advantage. The biggest corporations rally around their own states in the hope of economic gains after military victories. Looked at from this vantage point, the war in the Ukraine is both a war of national defence against a Russian invasion and a proxy war between two imperial powers, the US and Russia. Those who seek to deny or minimise the latter aspect are blind to this reality.

Consider only the sheer scale of the US intervention in Ukraine. It cannot be construed as simply sending a few weapons to resistance fighters. The US has been involved in arms transfers and training of Ukrainian armed forces since 2014. Since the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, it has sent a further €9.8 billion to date. This includes everything from Javelin anti-tank missiles to Switchblade drones, artillery and body armour, and increasingly some high-tech equipment like laser-guided rocket systems, surveillance radar, and Mi-17 helicopters. It is now pushing for the supply of Leopard tanks. As a comparison, the US sent €4 billion to Afghanistan in its last year of occupation.

After announcing yet another tranche of weaponry, Biden said "We're in a critical window now of time where [it is] going to set the stage for the next phase of this war". The use of the word "we" was significant. The US leader knows that his country is already in a proxy war with Russia. This is why the US president called on its main arms manufacturers to step up production of weaponry.

Behind the US military effort, there is a clear project of restoring US 'leadership' over Europe in ways that are reminiscent of the old Cold War. The main vehicle for asserting this leadership is NATO, and the US is pushing each member country into giving a pledge of 'loyalty'. This takes the form of publicly announcing details of the weaponry they are supplying for the Western war effort.

Britain presents itself as the main junior ally of the US. The Times reported that 'Former British soldiers, marines and special forces commandos are also in Ukraine working as training contractors and volunteers, but the Ukrainian officers were adamant that their training this month was carried out by serving British soldiers'. There is also a British led programme to train 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers to fight Russian forces. As the war enters a deadly phase, the Western powers are worried that up to 200 Ukrainian soldiers are dying each day. So they keep training more Ukrainians to replace them on the battle field. Since 2015, Britain helped train more than 22,000 Ukrainians through a program called Operation Orbital. This stopped just before Russia's invasion. As late as 2020, the British Army was boasting about Exercise Joint Endeavor. This involved the deployment of 250 members of the notorious chute regiment at short notice to join with their counterparts in a Ukrainian Air Assault battalion.

The mainstream media has mounted a massive effort to gain support for the war. The US has taken charge in leading in the propaganda war. The Ukraine Crisis Media Centre, for example, is funded by the US Embassy and other NGOs. The central figure is Liubov Tsybulska, a graduate of the US State Department leadership programme who advises the Ukrainian foreign ministry and the general staff of its army.

During the Afghan war, Britain and America learnt the value of using local forces to defeat the Taliban. In 2001, for example, the CIA gave the Northern Alliance a donation of \$1 million to gain their co-operation for an assault on Kabul. The US concentrated on bombing Taliban front lines while smaller numbers of US Special Forces guided the bombers and marshalled local forces for bloody field battles. It was an ideal form of imperial intervention, reducing the number of American casualties while inflicting massive casualties on the enemy.

Ukraine has brought this strategy to a new level. NATO is sending in huge amounts of sophisticated weaponry to Ukraine and has dramatically escalated a training programme for local forces. The US and Britain will encourage Ukrainian forces to fight to the last drop of their blood because their only aim is to weaken a rival empire – not to encourage any genuine liberation from colonial forces.

None of this justifies what Putin has done. There is no 'legitimate' Russia security concern in Ukraine – just as there is no 'legitimate' US security concern in Cuba. We should reject entirely the carve-up of our world between imperial powers who claim a divine right to spheres of influence. But neither should we ignore the reality of what is happening Ukraine. The reality is that a right wing regime is using the war to create a neoliberal paradise for foreign corporations.

The Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, has suspended eleven political parties over their alleged ties to Russia. While most of them were small and relatively unknown, one of them, the Opposition Platform for Life, came second in the most recent election and currently holds 44 seats in the 450-seat Ukrainian Parliament. It is important to note that what is designated as "pro-Russian" describes a wide variety of different views on global conflict and the various different imperialist spheres of influence. Though it is true that some of these parties have refused to condemn the Russian invasion, like in the case of the Progressive Socialists who have historically held a strongly pro-Russia and pro-Putin position, that is not true of all of them. Some are merely critical of Western influence, of NATO, or of the neoliberal market stance that Zelensky espouses.

As of today, there is no political party in government that bears the title of "socialist" or even "left" in its name. While the benevolent assumption remains that this was not out of a deliberate effort to erase the Left from the Ukrainian political spectrum, it has contributed to the "decommunisation" efforts introduced by a 2015 law that had suspended all openly communist parties. This move to first delegitimize and then ban these parties follows a larger pattern of Zelensky's attempts to consolidate his power.

While it is reasonable to assume that the suspension of Russia-aligned parties would be necessary to remove internal threats to national security, Zelensky's sanctions (which were often fuelled by questionable evidence, or lack thereof) on opposition media and political rivals have drawn criticism from the public. Under the rule of martial law, the working class has also suffered harsh punishments, as seemingly all other political agendas have been subjugated by the war effort. Martial law has led to a significant reduction in labour rights for ordinary working people despite numerous public appeals from the international community and trade unions in Ukraine. Not only have workers strikes and protests been banned, but law 5371 mandates that workers of small and medium-sized companies are now subject to contractual law instead of standard labour law with its appropriate labour protections.

The war in Ukraine also highlights the double standards of the West. Four million people died in bloody conflicts in Zaire and the mainstream media barely mentioned the conflict. Israel has been in occupation of Palestinian territory for decades and the UN has condemned its illegal presence. Yet the US supplies it with weapons and Israel is given a special economic arrangements with the EU. Saudi Arabia has pursued a brutal invasion in the Yemen but there are no sanctions imposed on it. Clearly, the Western powers are not motivated by humanitarian concerns or a desire to uphold the principle of self-determination. Their double standards show that there is another consideration at play. They see this conflict as not just a defence against invasion but as a proxy war between the West and the Russia-China axis.

Socialists, therefore, oppose both the Russian invasion and NATO's proxy war. In this we follow in the tradition of James Connolly and the position he took during World War 1. Then and now it was the weaker imperial power than began a new era of global conflict. In 1914, it was Austria who made the first moves. Today it is Russia, a country with a commodity driven economy and a GDP that is one tenth that of the USA.

In Ireland, James Connolly was the foremost opponent of that war. His first instinct was to challenge the propaganda of his own side, and this meant opposing the Home Rule Party led by John Redmond. These focused on the plight of Belgium and spoke about how this little Catholic nation was being overrun by Germany. Connolly opposed the invasion of Belgium but indicated that it was used by Britain to justify its own imperial ambitions.

Connolly pointed to the real consequences of war. He described in the most graphic way the horrors of bloodletting and slaughter. But he also pointed to its consequence in the home front: *"It already means that increased prices will be demanded for all food and household necessities. In every bite of food you eat you will be compelled to pay for the war"*.

Connolly, however, went much further in defining the war as a direct outcome of the capitalist system. In this he joined a small group of socialist revolutionaries whose analysis of war shapes the outlook of socialists to this day. He wrote:

"We have held, and do hold, that war is a relic of barbarism only possible because we are governed by a ruling class with barbaric ideas; we have held, and do hold, that the working class of all countries cannot hope to escape the horrors of war until in all countries that barbaric ruling class is thrown from power".

His words could not be more relevant today.

CHAPTER 5: SANCTIONS AND BOMBS

Let us, for the moment, bracket out the bigger picture of the imperial conflict between NATO and Russia and its allies. The Western media tends to do this by focusing on its chosen victims and showing their suffering. Thus, our television screens are dominated by pictures of mass graves left behind by retreating Russian soldiers or by the bomb attacks on civilian areas. Rarely is there such coverage of the sufferings of the Yemini people. As a result there is little understanding of the horrors that Saudi Arabia has inflicted. However, while this coverage is highly selective, it is not entirely negative because it brings home the reality of war and puts a spotlight on the brutality of Russian imperialism.

One effect is that many people, quite naturally, ask: what can we do to help? The question arises from a basic humanitarian instinct for solidarity with the oppressed. However, the political elite in European countries and America have pre-prepared answers. Helping Ukraine, they suggest means intensifying sanctions against Russia and supplying Ukraine with weaponry. This approach was echoed by Labour's Ivana Bacik when, in a recent speech in Dáil Éireann, she did not once mention NATO. Welcoming the fifth round of EU sanctions, she said that 'we are calling on our government to push for harder sanctions, to argue strongly within the EU for much stronger actions against Russia and in solidarity with Ukraine'. Mary Lou McDonald of Sinn Féin also supported sanctions.

Whatever the intentions of both politicians, the proposals for sanctions dovetails with the wider project of Western imperialism. This is to supply an ever increasing amount of weaponry to defeat its imperial rival. Both proposals will do little to bring genuine liberation to the Ukrainian people. Let's look at each in turn.

SANCTIONS: Even the most cursory examination of sanctions indicates that it has had no effect on the ability of Russian imperialism to wage its war. It has backfired and only led to a rise in energy prices throughout Europe, hitting the poorest most.

The current account surplus of the Russian economy has increased since the sanctions. The surplus for January-September 2022 stood at \$198.4 billion – roughly \$120 billion higher than for the same period in 2021. The reason is the sky-high prices for major Russian exports and the fact that it has reduced imports since the onset of the war. Global prices for oil and gas have soared and Russia has found alternative markets in Asia. The Russian rouble, far from collapsing in value, has strengthened. In response to the sanctions, Putin has been able to cut gas supplies to Europe, driving up prices further.

A similar picture is evident in the plans to break Russia's financial system. From an early stage, the US and EU froze Russian assets abroad, deprived its economy of access to the US dollar and the euro, and disconnected Russia from the SWIFT payment system. Yet the Russian Central Bank was able to impose capital controls and re-orient its financial sector. Even the right-wing Bruegel group noted that 'the comprehensive sanctions on Russia's financial sector were expected to have a substantial impact, but appear to have failed to achieve the desired effect'.

All of this was entirely predictable because the US has been imposing economic sanctions on different countries for decades – and most do not achieve their desired outcomes. Years of sanctions have failed in North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela, and Iraq. Cuba has faced an economic embargo since 1960, yet the Communist Party is still in power. In 1990, the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and within four days comprehensive sanctions were imposed on his regime. By 1997, a third of Iraqi children were malnourished due to the sanctions but it had little effect on Hussein. Incredibly, the US has imposed sanctions 61 times since 1993 – and most have failed miserably. Their main effect has been to cause untoward suffering for civilian populations. Nicholas Mulder, who is the main historian on sanctions, has noted that 'deaths by economic isolation were the chief man-made cause of civilian death'.

Sanctions also often help the governments who are targeted by causing a huge level of civilian suffering. They can then blame the foreign enemy for all their country's troubles. They wrap themselves in a nationalist flag to claim that government and civilians have a common interest in defending their country. This is precisely what has occurred in Russia. During the early stages of the war on Ukraine a spontaneous anti-war movement emerged, with thousands demonstrating in major cities. Putin broke this movement by awith vicious repression, threatening 15 years imprisonment for protestors. But as the sanctions targeted everyone – including those people protesting – he was able to whip up a patriotic sentiment, claiming that the West was aiming for the break-up of Russia.

Which begs an obvious question. If sanctions clearly fail in their declared objectives, why do NATO promote them so assiduously? Here we get to the nub of the issue. The Western leaders know that sanctions have a limited impact, but they also help at home in three specific ways. First, it builds up a war psychology. Typically, the Western propaganda focuses on an evil individual such as Putin – rather than a power structure behind him – as causing the war. The population are invited to do their bit to deal with this 'madman'. Secondly, sanctions give cover for the disastrous economic policies of the Western leaders. As inflation rises, they blame the war in Ukraine as the exclusive cause. When anyone questions the sanctions, they are denounced as a 'Putin puppet'. Instead, the population is told that 'sacrifices must be made to preserve freedom'. Finally, the sanctions serve the long-term goal of US imperialism. It has suffered an economic retreat during the era of globalisation that it once promoted. It now wants a more de-globalised world, where it can protect its industries and impose 'chokeholds' on countries like China. One tangible benefit of the sanctions on gas, for example, is that more countries become reliant on Liquefied Natural Gas which is exported by the US.

BOMBS: If sanctions are a failure, surely socialists should rally around the call to send more weaponry to the Ukrainian military? But have a look at the context.

The Kiel Institute for the World Economy tracks aid given to Ukraine. It estimates that between 24 January 2022 and 3 October 2022, Ukraine has received €94 billion in humanitarian, military, and financial aid. Of this huge sum, a staggering €40 billion has been received in military aid.

The US is by far the bigger contributor but a total of 37 other countries have made pledges of military aid. In a manner reminiscent of how feudal barons once pledged allegiance to their overlord, each of the allied countries publish their military aid package to confirm their loyalty to US leadership. Let's take Belgium as an example, at random. It has pledged anti-tank missiles known as MILANS; heavy mortars; 200 M72 LAWS anti-tank weapons; 5,000 FNC assault rifles; small arms ammunition and a host of other weaponry.

No national liberation movement fighting for self-determination has received such an amount of military aid. To put matters in perspective, the Ukrainian army has received the equivalent of the French military budget in one year.

This spending has resulted in a massive bonanza for the arms dealers. Lockheed Martin and Raytheon manufacture the Javelin antitank missiles which cost €78,000 each and €90,000 per launcher. Raytheon has received a contract worth \$624 million from the US state to replace its own stock of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. No wonder the corporation's profits jumped by 30 percent to reach \$13 billion this year. The share price of Lockheed Martin has trebled from \$2.21 the previous year to \$6.71 this year.

Ukraine has become a bloody battleground for arms dealers and generals who want to play war games with the lives of its people. NATO see this as a chance to test out the military capabilities of their Russian opponent, without deploying their own soldiers to battle.

The result for ordinary Ukrainians has been sheer horror. Every escalation of the war brings more destruction to their cities, more freezing conditions as energy infrastructure is targeted and countless deaths of young working class men and women. And for what? Russia has consolidated its hold over Donbass and Crimea. Rejecting any talk of peace as surrender, the armchair generals of NATO respond by calling for ever more escalation. But this in turn brings increased military operations from Russia and the consequent destruction of more cities and homes. Far from being a war of liberation, this has become a bloody test of the strength between imperial powers. Whoever wins, there will be little benefit for ordinary Ukrainians.

In a letter to the Irish Times, Sabina Higgins, wife of the Irish President spelled out a reality that few in the Irish establishment will acknowledge, 'Until the world persuades President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine to agree to a ceasefire and negotiations, the long haul of terrible war will go on. How can there be any winner?' She made clear her total opposition to the Russian occupation and demanded their withdrawal.

It is a view that socialists share. There is no ambiguity on our opposition to Russian imperialism. The issue is HOW the Russian military can be forced to withdraw. The Right claims that this can only be done by an ever escalating, conventional war and ignores the consequential destruction that follows. The Left argues that in conditions of peace, a major opposition movement can emerge which relies on 'people power' mobilisations inside Ukraine and global solidarity from outside. Such an opposition movement can combine armed action with an appeal to the many Russian soldiers who are disaffected by the war. It can make an open appeal to the anti-Putin movement inside Russia.

There are no guarantees of victory – no more than there is for Palestinians. But there will never be a good outcome when a struggle for national freedom becomes subsumed under the ambitions of imperialist powers.

CHAPTER 6: WHY WE DEFEND IRISH NEUTRALITY

The Irish elite have long hated the idea of Irish neutrality – even though it was instigated by a conservative politician, Eamon De Valera. They have called it a sacred cow, in need of slaughter. This contempt for neutrality is even more poignant now as they want to join NATO.

Yet most of the people support neutrality. A government White Paper in 1996 acknowledged that "the majority of the Irish people have always cherished Ireland's military neutrality, and recognise the positive values that inspire it, in peace-time as well as in time of war". An Irish Times/IPSOS poll conducted in April 2022 showed that two thirds of people supported neutrality.

The concept of Irish neutrality was first mooted during the First World War when James Connolly, the famous Irish socialist, constructed a broad front to oppose Irish support for Britain's war effort. The leader of the Home Rule Party, John Redmond, supported Britain's war effort and urged members of the Irish Volunteer movement to enlist. In return for this support Redmond claimed that he had been promised home rule and an Irish parliament once the war was over. Connolly, however, rejected this argument and set up an Irish Neutrality League alongside more militant republicans. The impetus for the alliance came from the threat of conscription, but so big was the scale of popular opposition that the British authorities deferred it.

When the Second World War was declared on 1 September 1939, it was only 17 years since the Irish Free State had gained independence. In the previous two years the country had been subjected to a bitter colonial war, spearheaded by British auxiliary forces, colloquially known as the Black and Tans. De Valera and the Fianna Fáil government wanted to assert Irish independence from its old empire. Three main considerations lay behind the adoption of a neutrality policy.

The first and most frequently cited reason was the partition that had been imposed on Ireland. Fianna Fáil, and the population more generally, regarded the division of Ireland as a historic wrong. Their sympathies lay with the nationalist population in the North whom they regarded as being oppressed by the Unionist party and the Orange Order. Military support for a colonial power that had imposed partition was, therefore, unthinkable.

The second reason for neutrality was that the Irish ruling class feared that any other policy would have opened deep divisions in their own society and undermined the stability of their rule. Intervention on the side of Britain would have led to an outcry. If British troops landed in Ireland to repel a German invasion, there was little doubt that they would be subject to attacks not only from the IRA but also from sections of Fianna Fáil itself. Similarly, if the Irish government showed any support for Nazi Germany there was little doubt they would be subject to British military intervention.

Thirdly, despite repeated reference to the wrongs of partition, Fianna Fáil's aim was to use "the emergency" – as they referred to the Second World War – as an opportunity to create a new identity between the 26 county state and its population. In brief, to forge a new 26 county Little Ireland nationalism. As the writer Terrence Brown later noted, "neutrality and the experience of the war times years mobilised Irish opinion for the first time to consider the 26-county state as the primary unit of national loyalty." De Valera used 'the emergency' to crush the IRA which he regarded as a threat to Fianna Fáil rule.

Irish neutrality thus arose from a complex set of factors but at its root was Ireland's anti-colonial legacy. When Britain claimed to be fighting for democracy and the rights of small nations, many in Ireland could not but think of its colonisation of Ireland and its continued oppression of countries such as India. Far from being an irrational, atavistic response, there were good reasons for Irish neutrality in WW2.

Whatever about its origins, Irish neutrality took on a life of its own in the decades afterwards. Under the Fianna Fáil Minister for Foreign Affairs, Frank Aiken, Ireland advocated an activist neutrality policy in the late 1950s. It refused to go along with American attempts to exclude China from representation at the United Nations. He also advocated the withdrawal of non-national armies and military personnel in Europe. As a small country, Ireland promoted a policy of peace and indicated that it would not join the Western military block. In a world divided by a Cold War, this was a moderate stance and never extended to the consistent non-aligned position that other former colonies adopted.

Nevertheless, the concept of neutrality and its underlying anti-colonial legacy is immensely popular. From the depths of Irish society, there has emerged significant scepticism and opposition to the machinations of world powers. Thus, most people instinctively sympathise with the struggle of the Palestinians. There is a deep and healthy awareness of how US foreign policy is shaped by an imperialist agenda. Thus, tens of thousands have marched against the visits of US presidents or joined protests against US occupations. There is an almost unanimous opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. More significantly, this popular support for Irish neutrality has come up against the plans of the Brussels elite and their Irish elite supporters to develop the EU into a powerful military force.

In 1972, when Ireland decided to join the EU, assurances were given that it would not affect Irish neutrality. The EU was initially established to create a large marketplace so that European corporations could expand and match their rivals. However, as we have argued, the central dynamic of modern capitalism is that economic competition tends to grow over into military competition as states use their power to gain extra advantages for their corporations. Not surprisingly, therefore, the longer term trajectory of the EU has been to develop into a military alliance and, contrary to its progressive rhetoric, to act as an old style imperial power. One difference between it and its rivals, however, is that it is often split by the competing interests of its constituent states.

The tendency towards EU militarisation has come up against the basic sentiment of the Irish people for neutrality. This became evident in 2001 when Ireland was the only country in the EU allowed a vote on the Nice Treaty. This called for enhanced co-operation in foreign and security policy, and sanctioned greater use of an EU Rapid Reaction Force.

The Irish people voted to reject this treaty, mainly because of its undermining of Irish neutrality. In order to get people to vote again and give 'the right answer' a special protocol was added to the constitution in article 29(4)9. This stated that Ireland would not take part in any common defence of the EU sanctioned by the European Council.

However the Irish elite and their EU counterparts, however had no intention of slowing down their drive to militarisation. And so, in 2009, another referendum was held, this time on the Lisbon Treaty. This went much further than the Nice Treaty in explicitly revealing the EU's military agenda. Article 27. 3, for example, stated that 'Member states shall make civilian and military capabilities available to the Union for the implementation of common security and defence policy'. Moreover, it stated that the EU would 'respect the obligation of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)... and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework'.

Once again, the Irish people rejected this treaty because they wanted no part in foreign wars, dictated by bigger states which had colonised parts of the world. But as in the Nice Treaty, their vote to reject the Lisbon Treaty was not accepted. They were told to vote again and under the compulsion of economic blackmail to give the 'right answer'.

From this brief discussion, it should be clear that even though Irish neutrality had its origin in a conservative anti-colonial legacy, it has become a major obstacle to the ambitions of the Irish elite to fully integrate the country into a Western imperial alliance. Moreover, the political elite have no intention of respecting the democratic wishes of their own people. Their loyalty is to the wider Western ruling class, led by a US who continually seek to assert their hegemony over the EU. For this reason, they have adopted a policy of constantly chipping away at neutrality.

This became most evident when they opened Shannon airport to US troops who were engaged in wars to colonise Iraq and Afghanistan. It is estimated that 3 million US troops have passed through the airport. The Irish government has denied that the airport was used for torture flights, known in military jargon as renditions. Yet they have consistently refused to inspect planes or even ensure that the US troops are not carrying weapons. A 2007 report by the European Parliament indicated that the CIA used European airspace for one thousand torture flights between 2001 and 2005. It also stated that 147 such flights had made stopovers in Ireland. Despite this disgraceful record, Irish politicians have stone-walled on the issue.

Since this glaring breach of Irish neutrality, the Irish elite have stepped up their efforts to undermine it. A small number of Irish troops have been sent to Afghanistan while it was under US occupation. In 2013, Ireland and Britain undertook a joint 'training mission' in Mali. In 2017, Fine Gael pushed through Ireland's membership of PESCO- the Permanent Security Co-operation pact of the EU. This committed the Irish state to increase defence spending by fivefold to reach 2percent% of GDP - even though the country needed money for a housing crisis.

The Ukraine war has finally brought into the open the real political agenda of the elite. They want to openly drop neutrality and join NATO. That way they can show they are fully committed to a Western alliance run by the US. Defending Irish neutrality is the best way to stop them.

